

Castlemaine Naturalist

May 2003

Vol. 26.4 #299



Note: If you have not paid your 2003 subscription, this will be your last newsletter. (Subs can still be sent direct to the Treasurer, c/o the Club P.O. Box.)

The Muddled-headed Wombat Rediscovered?

Last Sunday (13/4) as the skies opened and gave relief to the very dry landscape, I was driving from the Railway Station along Kennedy Street. As I approached the intersection at Mostyn St I spotted something scrambling out of the stormwater drain. Even with the windscreen wipers going and the rain pelting down I could not mistake the creature that by this stage was making a fast escape up the hill to the Anglican Church.

Stopping the vehicle and watching in wonder I was amazed at the speed of the animal as it sought refuge from the rain under the planted shrubs in the church ground.

Was I really seeing what I thought I was? – a rather wet and bedraggled Wombat? What a thrill!

Wombats have been reported in the Sutton Grange area and Taradale area of recent times but I think this is a first for Castlemaine. Has anyone else sighted Wombats locally?

Jenni Collier

(Perhaps we've made a mistake. There's neither an Easter Bunny, nor an Easter Bilby; perhaps its an Easter Wombat - flushed out of his hidy-hole a week early? Ed.)

Do Case Moths Live In this District?

This was the question hand written across the top of an article from a recent Age newspaper. The answer is yes, they certainly do, but I must admit I have not seen many of recent years. I'm not sure though, whether that is because I've been less observant, or there are fewer around.

Years ago I had one that lived on the bench on some leaves in my kitchen, and it would climb onto my proffered hand, and climb up my arm, leaving a double trail of tiny red dots. It was quite used to me by that time.

The females remain in the case, and the males find them there in some species, but not in all. "The eggs are laid in the pupal skin, as the shrivelled

female emerges within the pupal case. The larvae escape through the smaller opening of the case. At first they walk about rapidly on their thoracic legs, holding the abdomen high in the air. Soon they begin to spin themselves small cases which are gradually enlarged as the larvae grow." (Australian Moths, I.F.B. Common, Jacaranda Pocket Guides

Some of the species are garden and orchard pests, especially one that adds rough bits of leaves to the case. This one also has a wingless female which remains in the case. The male is almost black in colour, has short, rather rounded, almost transparent wings, and despite its dumpy appearance is apparently a very fast flyer.

Our "pet" one had made its case with eucalypt sticks, with one longer (approx. 6 cm) than the rest, which were about 4cms. It would periodically rest for a day or two, presumably shedding a skin, but would become active again. To defecate it would present its rear end at the bottom opening, but it would feed through the top one. I felt quite anxious when it didn't emerge for a while, but I found in the end that it was just pupating. It was a male, so emerged as a moth.

A more common one also makes the case with eucalypt sticks but these are all about 2 - 3 cms. I had one attach itself to my washing basket where it stayed for months until I finally realized it must have died. It never did emerge.

One less common one has ribs inside the tough case, like a furled umbrella with a bulge in the middle. Our daughter looked after one of these for some weeks. We've also found some made of dry grass stalks placed neatly side by side, and very untidy ones made of grass stalks placed higgelty pigglelty every where. Another one places short pieces of grass horizontally, like a "pig sty" we used to make with matches when we were children.

Rita Mills

Boobooks and Nightjars

Wandering in the bush paddock looking in any low hollows as I usually do on my walks, I was surprised by a little grey something that retreated into an old tree stump hollow as I peered in. It could not go very deeply into the hollow and at first I thought I had disturbed a little sugar glider. Looking closer I realized it had feathers not fur, was grey, had two very round dark eyes and tufts under its eyes. It tried to scare me by opening its mouth, which was very wide with a little beak like protrusion at the top. It was an Owlet Nightjar!

The following day I noticed a large bird chased out of a small Eucalypt by a group of smaller birds. The bird was a Boobook Owl. It landed in a nearby tree and watched me from above as I walked around the tree below.

Closer to home I noticed lots of birds around the buckets of water in the dogs' yards. I always place a stick in each bucket so frogs can get out

and the birds were using them as perches to drink from. There were White-plumed, White-naped, Yellow-tufted and Yellow-faced Honeyeaters all drinking together.

Geraldine Harris

New Zealand It Is!

How is it that, when thinking of travel to take in some wilderness for walking, camping and birding, the more exotic and far off places such as Malayasia, Thailand, Africa and even our own Kimberleys or Cape York often spring to mind, whereas 'The Land of the Long White Cloud' is nearer and can provide all the thrills and home comforts, including a common (well, mostly common) language.

It doesn't have to be full on for rock strewn river fishing, mountaineering or living it rough. Let me give an example for those of us of more advanced years, that is the old and the bold!

If you fly into Queenstown via Christchurch you can be on your way to the top of Lake Wakatipu four hours after leaving Melbourne. It is the biggest, 80kms by 5kms, glacial lake I know of, gorged to a depth of 400metres in places and filled once with ice to a height of 1200metres. To make it even more like an inland sea there is the Passenger Steamer 'Earnslaw' plying the trade daily to the distant sheep stations.

Make your base at Kinloch and Glenorchy at the top of the lake where the snow fed rivers flow in. There is a choice of Hotel, Motor Camp or Guest House for accommodation and the number of river and forest tracks to walk seem unlimited, either along the beautiful meadow land of the braided river flats, the favourite haunt of the fly fisher, or higher up into the forests above the Greenstones, the Capels, the Dart, the Rees and the Routeburn Rivers. These are not seasonal creeks but real mountain cascades flowing fast, furious and crystal clear right through the summer thanks to the constant snow melt and storm clouds breaking on the peaks of the Humboldt Mountains.

This is sub-alpine country featuring chasms, waterfalls, forests and flowering herbfields rich in birdlife as you pass from open valleys into closed Beech and Podocarp forests with abundant ferns, mosses, lichens and perching plants along the rock faces. Whole plant communities grow on the tree trunks nourished by the high rainfall. Higher up above the treeline and sheltered in the snow tussock grasslands are the mountain buttercups, daisies and ourisias

The first human traffic into the area would have been the Maoris in a search for greenstone (N.Z.jade) to trade among the tribes. Then the Europeans in the quest for grazing land started to come through in the 1860s and shortly after gold was discovered and tracks were cut through to the West Coast. Spiky Matagouri, a native with a near likeness to gorse,

dominates poor soil parts whereas Hebes, Boggpine and Orchids grow amongst the shrubs in the more fertile areas.

Mountain and Red Beech trees give way to Silver Beech, better adapted to wet conditions on the slopes and decorated with Goblin Moss (shades of Lord of the Rings!) while nearer the summit is home to Sundew and Bladderwort.

The rainfall in some parts averages 200 inches a year and the world's largest fuchsia, flowering in early summer, takes advantage of these wet conditions as does the world's largest buttercup, the Mount Cook Lily, a prize well worth seeing. Most of the flowers, including early Daisies and later Gentians plus the local Edelweiss are white or yellow because the common native pollinators are flies and moths which do not see colours.

The high country birds become part of each day - the Kea, a comical alpine parrot with a fixation on thieving anything left lying around, the forest dwelling Kaka (more sedate than its cousin the Kea), the tiny Rifleman, named from the colour of its "coat", together with the Rock Wren the survivors of a sadly depleted genus. The Bellbird, not related thankfully to our aggressive species of that name, is another. Also there's the Tui with its white throat ruff - hence its other name, the Parson Bird. Then there's the Tomtits, Pied Fantails, Robins constantly in attendance, the Yellowhead in the open, a plenitude of Paradise Ducks and a rare sighting the New Zealand Falcon which is not related to any Australian raptor. But still I yearn to see the Saddleback and the Kakapo, the flightless parrot that happens to be nocturnal and lek breeding, now down to a handful bravely fighting to survive with help from N.Z. conservationists.

In the future there is a Lake Unknown which I mean to get to, too.

Chris Morris

Observations

- Margaret Dunne reported 3 large parrots with red heads and red breasts, green backs and dark grey tails on her lawn at Walmer. Members present were unable to identify the birds from the description but agreed it was unlikely that they were King Parrots, as they are not recorded in this area
- A man phoned George Broadway in an attempt to identify a bird his wife has been feeding at their home in Clayton. Given that he described it as having a black bill and melodious call, George wondered if it might have been a Pied Butcherbird. Apparently the man had acquired a "Castlemaine Naturalist" while visiting Castlemaine and thought someone in the group might be able to answer his query.
- Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos were sighted at Glenluce. Richard Piesse
- The "little white feral" cat that was found on the Coliban Channel excursion was diagnosed as deaf and a new home has been found for it

where it has two dogs and two other cats as companions. It is an 'inside cat' these days. Margaret Willis.

- Tony Morton observed 20 Rainbow Bee-eaters at Glenluce while walking along the Loddon water race going towards Vaughan. The birds were gathered around a pond of water and their beaks could be heard clicking as they caught insects in the air.
- Stan Bruton watched a flock of Magpies and ravens at Campbells Creek having some sort of confrontation, with the Magpies facing the ravens and behaving in a threatening manner until the intruders were driven off.
- A number of birds were noted by some members who walked the track from Vaughan Springs to Sailors Gully, including White-naped, White-eared, Yellow-faced and Fuscous Honeyeaters, Eastern Spinebill, Scarlet Robin, Buff-rumped Thornbills, Eastern Rosella, Jacky Winter and Dusky Woodswallow. Lesley Perkins
- Hans van Gemert noted that White-naped Honeyeaters he had recently identified were in fact Black-chinned Honeyeaters.
- Since the rain several people have spotted tiny crimson insects wandering among leaf-litter. Close scrutiny with reversed binocs revealed the fact that the little white spots were actually wing-buds. They seem to be instars of bugs of some kind.
- Also being reported since the rain - wood moths, including the large and bumbling Wattle Goat Moth. (Driving across Moloort Plain on the evening of 13/4 we found ourselves among swarms of insects, including the occasional large moth, which probably were wood moths. The larvae are Bardee, or Witchetty, Grubs.) Rita Mills
- Liz Freeman has sent us a photo of Crested Pigeon hatched in her Callistemon.
- Richard Piesse noted scores of Noisy Friarbirds in the Ironbarks in the Diamond Hill vicinity.
- Pied Currawongs have arrived in town this week (24/4/03). Ern Perkins

Birds at the Golf Course

Pelican	Yellow-tufted,
Dusky Woodswallows	White-naped,
White-bellied and	New Holland and
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes	Black-chinned Honeyeaters
Grey Shrike-thrush	Musk and
Crested Shrike-tit	Purple-crowned Lorrikeets
Golden Whistler	Striated Pardalote
Grey Fantail	White-browed Babblers
Brown Treecreeper	Red-browed Finches
	Flame Robin

Also 99% sure - imm. Grey Butcherbird on 13th fairway. Debbie Worland

FROM THE BUSINESS MEETING 24/4/03

Welcome to new members: Alicia Hewitt, Jan and Neil Maling.

Roadside Conservation. It was decided to write a letter to the CEO to lobby for funding to be allocated for Roadside Plant Identification and Assessment in the forthcoming budget. If it could be established a Roadside Conservation Committee would be an excellent body to help ensure that the Roadside Strategy Document that was drawn up a number of years ago was acknowledged and valued.

Several large trees are under threat from roadworks on the corner of Richards and Dawes Rd. near Wattle Flat Cricket Ground. A request is to be made for an onsite inspection with appropriate Shire staff.

It is considered that **inquiries** need to be made in regard to the future of **Long Swamp** and its management.

Ern drew our attention to an article in the Australian Geographic regarding a proposal by Tim Entwisle to place **the archives of the National herbarium on the Internet**. This would be a fantastic move. They are asking for donations to raise \$1million towards this project.

At a recent meeting of the Victorian Field Naturalists Association, concern was expressed at the **declining numbers of FN Clubs** in the State. Mornington, Benalla and Colac have all closed down and Maryborough, Alexandra, Horsham and Stawell/Ararat are all struggling with declining memberships. Other groups such as the Bird Observers, Landcare, Trust for Nature and Land for Wildlife all compete with FN groups for members with an interest in the environment and increased insurance fees have made survival difficult for some groups. Castlemaine is one of the few clubs with a healthy membership.

Is it a native? CD

Included in this newsletter you will find a flier for our new CD – Is it a native? Please use it to order a CD or pass it on to a friend who might be interested in purchasing one.

Warning: this CD is addictive and guaranteed to inform.

Native Plant ID

How to identify Local Flora of the Mount Alexander Shire – Francis Cincotta

This is a new course being offered at Continuing Education, Castlemaine. Francis is an enthusiastic local field naturalist, and grower of native plants. The classes will run for 6 weeks on Tuesdays from 7.30 - 9pm from May 13 to June 24 with a possible excursion afterwards. Cost: \$55, concession avail. Bookings 5472 3299. Highly recommended.

PLANTS OF THE MOUNT ALEXANDER SHIRE:

Slender Speedwell, *Veronica gracilis*

This small, scrambling perennial prefers open forest. The slender stems are



half erect with greyish-green (sometimes bright green) slightly hairy leaves which are narrow-lanceolate in this area. Apparently it is a very variable species, but Dr. Jim Willis remarked in his Handbook to plants of Victoria, that "critical study is desirable in this and other groups of the genus."

The fragile flowers are blue striped with deeper blue, 4 - 8mm across, with four pointed petals, two stamens and are in a loose raceme at the end of the stems. It is widespread and common.

Rita Mills

??????? What made you decide to become a FN member? Geraldine Harris (Ph 5474 2244) would like to know when and why you joined Field Nats if you have a moment, please, for a short article in next month's newsletter - which happens to be #300.

Disclaimer - The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the Club.

Reminder - Articles, reports and observations for the CN can be left with Noellene at Tonks Bros., Barker St. if that is more convenient for you.

*Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club,
PO Box 324,
Castlemaine.
Incorporation #A0003010B*

Subscriptions for 2003 -

Ordinary membership: Single \$22, Family \$30

Pensioner or student: Single \$19, Family \$24.

The subscription includes postage of the *Castlemaine Naturalist*.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club, May 2003.

Programme

General meetings are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) hall at 8.00 pm on the second Friday of each month, except January.

Excursions are usually on the Saturday following the general meeting, and leave promptly at the times stated from **The Octopus, opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street**. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are **NO excursions on total fire ban days**.

Business meetings are held at 27 Doveton Street on the 4th Thursday of each month, except December, at 7.30 pm. All members are invited to attend.

Visitors are welcome at club meetings and excursions.

Sun. May 4. *Ballarat FNC* visiting the area. All day excursion. Meet at Green Gully, near Newstead at 10.15 am. (Same program as last outing, EP leading)

Sun. May 4. *Display in Market Building*. Computer demonstrations of Box Ironbark CD and Is it a Native? CD.

Fri. May 9. *Insects*. Alan Yen. Alan has been surveying the Eltham Copper Butterfly colony found in Kalimna park. UCA hall, 8pm.

Sat. May 10. *The new Walking Trail on Mount Alexander*. Leader: R. Piesse. Leave from the Octopus at 1.30pm sharp. Wear sturdy footwear.

Sat May 17. *Heritage Festival Walk to Tubal Cain Mine Site*. Time: 9.30am – 12noon. Meet at Vaughan Springs picnic area. An easy mining history walk along the Great Dividing Trail. Bring morning tea. Contact: R. Piesse Ph: 5473 4106.

Fri. Jun. 13. *Plantings in the Drought*. Jenny Collier. UCA hall, 8pm.

Sat. Jun. 14. *Barkly Park, Taradale*. Leader: J. Collier. Leave from the Octopus from 1.30pm sharp.

Fri. Jul. 11. *Snakes in the Hand*. Chris Hay, licensed snake handler. UCA hall, 8pm.

Sat. Jul.12. *Eppalock – glacial remains*.

Fri. Aug. 8. *History of the Coliban Water Channels*. Geoff Russell. UCA hall, 8pm.

Sat. Aug. 9. *Coliban Water Channel*.

Fri. Sep. 12. *Sri Lanka's Birds*. Stuart Dashper, Birds Australia. UCA hall, 8pm.

Sat. Sep. 13. *Garfield Wheel to Exhibition Pass*. Leader: R. Piesse.

Fri. Oct. 10. *Platypus Conservancy*. Dr. Melody Serena. UCA hall, 8pm.

Sat. Oct. 11. *Mandurang*. Max Stevens.

Fri. Nov. 14. *Natural History, Outback*. Trevor Blake. UCA hall, 8pm.

Sat. Nov. 15. *Bendigo Sewerage Ponds*. Leader: Chris Morris.

2003 Committee - C. Morris (President) 9985 4221, J. Turnbull (VP and Grievance Officer) 5474 3035, G Broadway (Secretary) 5472 2513, H van Gemert (Treasurer) 5472 1082, E Perkins, R Mills (Newsletter Ed & Public Officer), G Harris, (Ass't Newsletter Editor), B Maund, M Oliver R Piesse and J Cole.